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ABSTRACT

The social climate in Manitoba has led, in the past 25 years, to an expectation of school reform that has been translated into varieties of political action. However, most of the reforms, instituted by government policymakers, have fallen short of public expectations. This paper explores lessons to be taken from these experiences in school reform and proposes new ways of achieving excellence in compulsory schooling in Manitoba. In the past, Manitoba has attempted to realize excellence in five main ways: curriculum fixing, authority sharing, school setting humanizing, school setting engineering, and effective teaching. The first four ways have failed, for various reasons, to effect significant change in the schools. The fifth way--effective teaching--has been (to some degree), and can continue to be, the main road toward educational reform. Teachers must, however, be more adequately prepared and nurtured in their role of school reformer. Teacher education must encourage a "critical manner" in teachers that focuses on curriculum, pedagogy, and conditions for planning and implementation. Teachers must think more clearly about what, how, and why they teach. Supervisory practices must also be conducive to the development of this critical manner in teachers. Twenty-two references are appended. (IW)

RECENT HISTORY OF SCHOOLING REFORM IN MANITOBA *

by

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"It is conceded in all lands that
under the existing system the great
benefit indicated by the term
"popular education" is not attained.
The quality of schools existing is
deplorably below the mark."

A Melancholy Picture of Schools in New Jersey. 1835.

"It would not seem unreasonable to insist that young men of nineteen years of age who present themselves for a college education, should be able not only to speak, but to write their mother tongue with ease and correctness. It is obviously absurd that the college ... the institute of higher education ... should be called upon to turn aside from its proper task of imparting elementary instruction which should be given in ordinary grammar schools."

Harvard College of Over-seers. 1892.

A Climate for Reform

There is a sense in Canada today that not all is quite right with our compulsory schools.[1] It is not so much that people believe that schools are bad places. It is, more to the point, they say, that excellence does not permeate its activities, nor is it used to describe the performance of its primary actors, teachers and students. The title of a recent feature article in Canada's leading newsmagazine, Maclean's, aptly embraces this somewhat unhappy social climate for our compulsory schools. According to Maclean's, the schools are "In Search of educational excellence."[2] It is clear to far too many that our schools have not reached that desired state of excellence; they are only somewhere en route.

In some provinces, policy makers are attempting to create the conditions within which schools could be reformed and turned into places of excellence. For example, in 1981, Alberta Education introduced a program to test the performances of both students and teachers, and to assess the quality of individual schools, and in 1983, the government reintroduced standardized, province-wide exams for selected grade levels. The Ontario government has issued in conservative reforms for the intermediate and senior school levels such as increasing the number of compulsory secondary school courses from nine to sixteen, raising compulsory graduate requirements from 27 course credits to 30 credits, and introducing formal codes of student conduct.

While there is widespread belief among teachers and administrators in the province of Manitoba that the schools are better places than they ever have been, the government has recently adopted the slogan "quality education" under which to introduce policies for schooling reform. Manitobans, the government argues, have aspirations to improve their schooling and the quality of its teaching. The social climate clearly is a ripe one in which schooling reform has become an expectation; an expectation which has been translated into a political promise, and which is now, political action.

Historically in Canada, provincial governments have assumed and played the role of schooling reformer. To put that another way, policy makers, who are at the first level of school system governance, have mandated reform practices for school personnel, mainly administrators of schooling systems and individual schools, and teachers. During the last 25 years in particular, these reform practices have varied widely in terms of their targets, scopes, presuppositions, and objectives. However, the majority have had one dimension in common. Almost all, with the probable exception of immersion education and the new mathematics, have not been successful in bringing about major reforms in schooling. For a host of reasons, most of the reforms fell short of the expectations of their champions and, more important, the expectations of the public. Consequently, most of these reforms are no longer part of the warp and woof of the tapestry of today's

schooling practices. Nonetheless, there are lessons to be taken from these experiences in schooling reform.

My purpose in this essay is to describe the ways in which we could engage, properly so, in the reform of our schools and our school systems. Simply, the question to be asked and answered is a deceptively benign one. What is the proper way to excellence in compulsory schooling? Because the Canadian experience in schooling is primarily a provincial one, given the governance structures characteristic of Canadian federalism, I will focus on the reforms in one provincial arena, Manitoba. While the arguments in the essay are formulated from the analysis of one provincial case study, it is important to note that the experiences in other provinces are clearly similar enough that safe and useful generalizations about schooling reform are not only possible, but are sensible and useful to make.

The essay consists of two parts. First, I examine the last 25 years of schooling reform in Manitoba in order to distill, from the past, lessons that are instructive in terms of thinking about schooling reform generally, and the improvement of teaching in particular. Second, given the lessons on schooling reform, I begin to answer the most pressing question that policy makers, administrators, parents, students, business people and all others who have a stake in our school are asking today. That question, simply put is: What is the proper way to achieve excellence in compulsory schooling in Manitoba, and in all likelihood, Canada?

Lessons on Schooling Reform from Manitoba's Past

To begin to make a claim or two about the proper way to excellence in schooling, it surely makes good sense to make clear two points. First, that the ways to excellence that have been engaged in during our most recent schooling past have not been the right ways. That is to say, the ways have been less than successful on three counts. One, most of the reforms are no longer apparent in our schools. Two, the schools still receive their share of criticism in the professional and popular literature and from the mouths of parents, politicians and other interested publics. Finally, and three, all of this talk today about the need for effective schooling and teaching precipitate a conclusion that schools are not the places of excellence many would want them to be.

My second point emerges out of the first one. Simply, it is this. If we have not attained the quality of schooling deemed desirable in Manitoba, then a way to begin to address this unhappy situation is to ask and to answer at least three urgent questions. First, who, properly speaking, should be the school reformers? Ministers of Education, parents, business tycoons, publishers, professors of education, teachers, students, the people riding the public transit? Second, whoever the proper reformers are, are they up to the task? If the answer here is a negative one, then the third question is what can be done about it?

The First Question

In an attempt to answer the first question (which was, who, properly speaking, should be the school reformers?) let me begin by eliminating some of those who have regarded themselves as reformers but who have, apparently, failed at the task. In order to do this, let us visit Manitoba's recent schooling past in order to distill from it some general lessons on school reform. I will confine myself to the last quarter century for this investigation.

It seems that Manitoba has attempted to attain the goal of excellence in schooling in five identifiable but not mutually exclusive ways. I am not implying a chronology here, although in some specific instances, trends probably could be deduced. These five ways in which Manitoba attempted to realize excellence are:

1. Curriculum Fixing
2. Authority Sharing
3. School Setting Humanizing
4. School Setting Engineering
5. Effective Teaching

I will examine each way to schooling reform briefly and my focus will be on the lessons about reform to be taken from each.

Curriculum Fixing

Curriculum fixing is most simply defined as the attempted injection of fully developed curriculum innovations into teaching situations, normally classrooms, by the school governors, namely policy makers, administrators, and consultants. This practice of

curriculum fixing is driven by two presuppositions which are held by the school governors. The first presupposition is that the injection of a curriculum fix would heal all that was ailing and failing in the schools. Some reformers even went so far as to say that the innovations not only would fix the ailing and failing schools, but the supposed ailing and failing province as well. The second presupposition was that experts rather than teachers were given the responsibility for curriculum innovation because teachers lacked the necessary expertise to do so. In some cases, the authority of the teacher was questioned so severely that some reformers attempted to build teacher-proof curriculum fixes. Their intent, it seems, was to curtail as much as possible the influence that teachers might impose on the curriculum innovation.

That is not to say, however, that centrally mandated curriculum fixes are inherently bad. Some outstanding curricula were produced in or imported into Manitoba. I remember them well: New Math, Chem Study, BSCS Biology, Women Studies, Native Studies, the New Social Studies, Canadian Studies, bilingual education, multicultural education, the co-operative curriculum project. Most of these curriculum fixes have been classified as having failed to do what the developers and advocates intended them to do.

There was a lesson however in all of this mainly unsuccessful curriculum innovation activity. It is this. Curriculum reform is central, clearly, to any thoughts about and practices in schooling

reform. That is, curriculum reform is fundamental to excellence in schooling.

There is also a second lesson here that is significant. To the chagrin of most of the reformers, the school governors and those experts on curriculum matters, most of the fixes were either rejected by teachers outright, or were adapted, sometimes in some extraordinary ways, by the teachers who did use them. When these experts visited schools in which were practiced their innovations, most of them expressed shock at what they found. Some unfortunates discovered that their innovations existed in name only and were nowhere to be found in the day-to-day life of the classroom.

What we learned from these events was that teachers exert enormous power within their teaching situations. In the classroom arena, teachers are the ones who determine what their students learn; not the curriculum fix. Clearly, there are certain conditions within the teaching situation that enabled teachers to wield enormous power, whether curriculum reformers and schooling policy makers and administrators liked it or not.

Authority Sharing

A second way in which Manitoba tried to attain the goal of excellence in schooling is through what can be termed authority sharing. That is, the authority to make and to implement policy was shared by the school governors with a number of groups, such as teachers, parents, students, and influential lobby groups. Two

primary and salient examples of authority sharing were community schools and school-based curriculum development. However, within individual schools, authority sharing occurred through reforms such as team teaching, cooperative teaching, differentiated staffing, and the use of teachers aids and school volunteers. Essentially, through authority sharing, decision-making about a variety of matters was decentralized. However, what is significant here is that authority sharing primarily affected changes in the structure of schooling, not in its substance. It is sad to note that most school-based curriculum innovations went the way of the central curriculum fix.

Presupposed within the various approaches to authority sharing was the argument that alterations in the structures of schooling would provide for excellence. None of the exemplars were acclaimed as producing the hoped for quality. However, in such either unproven successes or supposed failures in authority sharing lay two significant lessons. First, alterations in the structure of the school organizations did not change in fundamental ways the direct or most immediate conditions within which teachers and students work. And, second, it is these immediate or primary conditions, and not the secondary conditions such as those which were the focus of authority sharing, that have much to do with the reform of teaching.

School Setting Humanizing

The third way in which Manitobans tried to achieve excellence in schooling was through the humanizing of the schooling setting. The rhetoric and ideology that justified this way to reform in Canada generally is captured best in Ontario's famous Hall-Dennis Report titled Living and Learning. To humanize the school setting was to make it, simply, student centred. Out were thoughts and talks about teachers and teaching; in were thoughts and talks about students and learning.

The premises of the humanist argument were simple but clearly influential. It was believed that traditional school structures were debilitating for students, while humanistic school structures were empowering for students in terms of their development of personal awareness, personal growth, and social maturity. The goal of schooling was, in short, emancipation; emancipation of students from regulations and structures.

This humanistic argument underscored or spured on practices such as open education, open plan schools, nongraded curricula, continuous progress evaluations, learning centres, individualized learning programs, multi-age class groupings, integrated curricula, thematic curricula, student advisor programs, student initiated and independent study projects, and diverse program electives. Eliminated universally were secondary school departmental exams, high school entrance or promotion exams, and school inspection by government school inspectors. The humanistic

argument reached its zenith in print form with the release in Manitoba of the paradoxically labelled Core Report in 1973, in which claims such as the following appear.

> "The basic purpose of education is to provide the instrument through which each individual realizes self-respect, self-fullfillment, and his relevance in a dynamic society, and it is mandatory that the educational system be on-going, flexible, and centred on the human needs of the students that it is designed to serve." (p. 3)

Nonetheless, the lessons on school reform in the humanist reforms are salient ones. It seems that the focus of the humanistic reforms was squarely on the students and only tangentially on teachers. This seems to be one of the fatal flaws that brought about the demise of the humanistic way to quality education. Another lesson here reinforces a previous lesson. The reforms to humanize schooling were directed primarily at the structures of schooling and secondarily on the emotional states of students, rather than at the complexity of conditions that mediate classroom life. Thus, the reforms either missed the target of teaching and the immediate conditions for and of teaching completely, or were attentive to only one of the many groups who compose the school setting.

School Setting Engineering

The fourth way in which Manitoba tried to achieve quality education was through school setting engineering. Central to the engineering of reforms were the ideas and practices associated with efficiency, productivity, and objectivity as they applied to

school management, classroom management, and curriculum planning and implementation.

Student enrolments during the seventies had started to level off and in some cases to decline. The schools were no longer perceived as agents of social reform; it was no longer believed that the schools could build a new social order. The economic problems of the decade; recession, unemployment, underemployment, inflation; were recognized as being far beyond the purview of the compulsory schools. School financing was severed and the schools now had to compete vigorously with other social services for the dwindling tax dollar. The questions about the returns on the investment in the compulsory schools became sharp ones.

The schooling response to this pressing social context was the adoption and implementation of practices that were modelled from business and which had as their essence the efficient control of people and resources. The emphasis was placed on management via needs assessment, task analysis, rational planning, and the measurement of objectives. The presupposition here and held by the school governors was that controlling the system, controlling the people in it, and controlling the ways in which they thought and got along with one another would provide the necessary conditions for excellence. Curriculum and instructional planning by objectives (and only Bloom's seemed to do) and school system and unit management by objectives were claimed to be necessary to

enhanced efficiency in schooling, and where there is efficiency, the logic went, effectiveness would follow in its wake.

Efficiency measures were primarily directed at the organization and management of schooling and classrooms, and the design and implementation of curriculum. At the secondary level, the curriculum was divided into two streams; namely, the university entrance program and the general program. Within these programs, phasing was implemented to further subdivide the curriculum. At the elementary level, students were grouped according to their abilities. All curricula were to have clearly stated and measurable behavioral objectives. The most noted innovation that was part of this setting engineering was what was hailed to be a "return to the basics." Manifestations were core curricula, standardized tests, tight classroom discipline, even dress and hair length codes, and places called fundamental schools. The back to the basics reformers were primarily outsiders to the classroom; namely, parents, some fundamental religious organizations, legislators, and big business. What was interesting about this back to the basics reform movement was that it adopted the surface countenance of a curriculum reform movement, but in its more fundamental and deeper dimension, it was a structural or organizational reform movement. Back to the basics was less about curriculum and ways of life in the classroom than it was about the centralization of policy and operations

decision making and the loosening of local community control over schooling.

While the battle about who should make the policy and operational decisions continues to rage, there was a valuable lesson regarding schooling reform hidden in all of this. Teachers once more were effecive in co-opting the imposed reforms through the presentation of a surface facade such as devoting more time to the teaching of language and mathematics while changing the substance of their classroom curriculum in only minor and usually inconsequential ways. The reforms again did not attend to those immediate conditions that guide and drive classroom life.

Within this notion of reform via the engineering of settings, one idea and its practical manifestation surfaced that are important. It was obvious to many that the management style of the administrator had much to do with successful changes in schooling practices. What was not clear though was the indirect link between effective management practices and quality education. In all likelihood, that link had much to do, it was thought, with the ways in which administrators supervised teachers in their instructional arenas. Therefore, the supervision of teaching became yet another way in which it is believed that settings could be engineered for quality. While instructional supervision, which was closely linked with teacher professional development, did not have as its overt objective the control of teachers, however,

covertly, the actual practice and consequence were most clearly that.

It is significant to note that there was a tendency on the part of some supervisors to incorporate principles of effective teaching into their supervisory practices. The lesson from some partial successes with instructional supervision was that in order to improve their practice, teachers require particular support structures that enable them to identify their weaknesses, acquire new skills, and practice them in an open and supportive environment. Concurrent with this attention to the improvement of teaching via supervison has been the dramatic emergence of the currently advocated proper way to excellence in schooling: the application of the presciptions in the research on effective teaching. It is too soon, though, to determine what our lessons have been. Nonetheless, there are some cautionary notes to be played about the prescriptions for school reform via effective teaching, notes that will sound in the subsequent sections of this essay.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

What I have done so far is discuss four of the most significant and most often practiced ways and introduced the latest way in which Manitoba has engaged in the reform of its schools during the last quarter century. The problems that the reforms were to tackle were complex ones, granted, but they failed to change the schools in profound and enduring ways and, in 1975,

the OECD[3] examiners remarked that after an era of great reform, what they found in Canadian schools was something suspiciously traditional. It seems that in particular Manitoba's recent history of schooling reform has not been regarded as successful as many had hoped; far too little had changed in the schools. Or, to put that another way: schools might have changed during that period, but the ways in which they changed are no longer valued today. Manitobans today have learned much about how not to reform their schools clearly, but they are left also with many lessons that are instructive in how to engage in schooling reform. There are at least seven not mutually exclusive lessons that emerge from the ways in which attempts at reform were made and which Manitobans should heed. They are, not in any order of priority, significance, or chronology:

1. Teachers and the act of teaching are fundamental to any attempts to reform schools. All other dimensions of the schooling institution are secondary to schooling reform.
2. Curriculum reform is the essence of quality education in our schools.
3. Curriculum reforms cannot be easily or simply injected as fixes into teaching situations by reform advocates external to the schools.
4. Teachers in their teaching situations, which are normally classrooms, have considerable power to determine not only how teaching will occur but of what that teaching will consist.

That is, teachers have the power to determine to a large degree both pedagogy and curriculum content.

5. Alterations in the structure of the schooling organization do not in fundamental ways change the most immediate or direct conditions under which teachers work.

6. Alterations in the most immediate, normally classroom-based conditions under which teachers work, will enable teachers to improve their practices, and hence, reform the curriculum.

7. Teachers, who want to improve their practices, in great likelihood, will benefit from careful and focused instructional supervision and assistance.

Towards an Answer to the Three Questions

When I began this essay, I posed three questions. Let me now answer them. My first question was to ask who properly should be the school reformers? The answer is clear. Whether teachers want to shoulder the burden or not, the responsibility for school reform lies primarily with them. If teachers are not willing to assume this responsibility, then excellence in schooling will remain only a fanciful dream, the stuff of articles of professors of education and the policies of ministers of education, but not the stuff of classrooms.

My second question was to ask whether the reformers are up to the task of school reform. My answer to this question is a little tough; a little tender. My answer is "no, but..." The conditions in our teacher preparation programs and in our schools have failed

to prepare our teachers for and to nurture them in the role of school reformer. Teachers are the most important professional group in our school systems and they must be regarded as such. It is essential that individuals from school governors to parents to the people riding the public transit realize that it is imperative that they not only understand this, but that they provide the necessary conditions within which teachers are able to assume the role of school reformer. So, what can be done? Let me briefly sketch for you the beginnings of an answer to my third question.

Teachers, Teaching, and the Reform of Compulsory Schools

To begin, since the focus for any thoughts on school reform must be on teachers and teaching, let me take a position on teaching as an intellectual, social, and political activity. There are four types of decisions or what might be more appropriately termed professional decisions made by teachers and which, in one sense, define what they do. First, there are those about planning for teaching. Second, there are those about implementing the prescriptions in the teaching plans. Third, there are those associated with problem recognition and solution, specifically the identification and elimination of problems associated with matters of curriculum and pedagogy. Fourth, there are those decisions associated with the improvement of the quality of conditions for and of teaching itself. Teachers must be able to make these four types of professional decisions; namely planning, implementing, problem solving, and improving or

reforming; in thoughtful and sensible ways. In order to engage in thoughtful and sensible decision-making, teachers must bring a critical manner to their work.

Unfortunately, teachers in Manitoba and elsewhere generally do not have such a necessary critical manner. In 1966, Jackson was one of the earliest writers who made this point forcefully and persuasively. Teachers, he wrote, bring a conceptual simplicity and an inability to analyze their work situations that is typical of most other professionals. However, and in the teachers' defence, Lortie (1975) claimed that the ethos of the occupation is tilted against such engagement in critical inquiry and conversation. Because teachers do not bring this critical perspective to their activities, he wrote, they tend to talk about the "tricks of their trade," rather than about broader conceptual patterns that underlie their practices. This is further compounded by the teachers inability to evaluate their successes and failures according to some clearly identifiable criteria. In 1982, Shermis and Barth underscored these conclusions in their study of the simplistic, loose and disparate conceptual schemes that Social Studies teachers in the United States bring to their work. In 1985, I questioned whether most teachers can earn the authority necessary to reform their practices, and my answer was not a positive one (Common, 1985).

We must not, however, fall prey to the trap of blaming teachers for the lack of excellence in our schools. That is far

too easy to do, and tends to obscure the total problem. The development of a critical manner by student teachers has not been the goal of many teacher preparation programs. Nor has it been the goal of many of our professional development programs for practicing teachers. And nor is the development of a critical manner the concern of many if any approaches to teacher supervision. Surely, those who prepare, supervise, and provide in-service development for teachers must shoulder much of the blame. However, pinpointing blame does little to rectify the situation.

There are two problems here clearly. The one about proper teacher preparation however is beyond the territory of this essay. The second, certainly, is not. Therefore, let me attend to the task of suggesting what could be done in the supervision of practicing teachers in our schools in order to enable them to develop the critical manner necessary to the acts of school reform and the pursuit of excellence in schooling. All of this, though, must be preceded by a discussion of this poorly understood but indispensible critical manner in teaching.

A Critical Manner and Teaching

I use the phrase "to have a critical manner" to embrace a particular state of mind that teachers necessarily must have if they are to reform their practices. The foci for this critical manner are three: curriculum and pedagogy, and the conditions within which curriculum are planned and implemented within the

politics and culture of schooling and are brought to life through the acts of pedagogy. The critical mind not only knows something about these three dimensions of teaching, but understands how they relate and why certain relationships bring about certain ends. The critical mind delves beyond the surface appearances of teaching; beyond the curriculum plans and its artifacts, the observable instructional and managerial acts of pedagogy, and the identifiable characteristics of the situation in which the curriculum is determined and subsequently mediates the acts of pedagogy. The critical mind explores deeply into how and why teaching occurs and determines as best it can in what sense the teaching is good and right, bad and wrong. When it does these things, the critical mind has reached a level of understanding that can be described best as theoretical. It is at this and from this theoretical state that the critical mind works. It is at this and from this state that a critical manner in teaching emerges.

At the essence of this theoretical state necessarily are recognized and sound educational theories that will be integrated with experientially based, broad explanatory schemes about the realities of teaching, and at its frontiers are invention, creativity, and controversy. The activities of the critical mind are the constant building and reconstructing of the theoretical base of teaching coupled with the rationalization of teaching actions by the theoretical foundations. In sum, a critical manner

is displayed when a teacher thinks and feels and subsequently acts and judges from a justifiable theoretical superstructure. It is this superstructure that is the context for understanding and appreciating, and ultimately for improving, the act of teaching.

There is an important point to add to all of this. One essential dimension of the critical manner that teachers will bring to their professional practice is what I termed as sound educational theories. However, there is great debate in the academic field of education on the validity, usefulness, and educational justification of most extant theories. It has been argued that the teaching of reading is secured by sensible theory (Broudy, 1985). Didactic forms of teaching are also theoretically rationalized. Socratic teaching is less theoretically secure, but models and principles exist to buttress its practices somewhat. However, the instructional psychological theoretical base of teaching generally clearly is quite shakey and loose. Curriculum studies is a field in disaray, preoccupied with theorizing about theorizing while offering few theoretical prescriptions for practice. Organizational theories seem to be distantly removed from the central act of the schooling organization itself, namely teaching, and have provided only a little useful template upon which to think and act as a teacher.

The research on teaching effectiveness, which drives our currently in vogue way to excellence in schooling, appears to be in a similarly questionable albeit different situation. Because

there is little evidence to suggest safely that research on effective teaching has enabled teachers to understand better what they do, there is little hope that from this body of literature will emerge a sensible and valid theory on teaching (Gamble, Jr., 1985). This literature is more a composite of techniques and strategies than it is anything else. On all counts, it seems that our most powerful educational theories; those of, say, Dewey, Aristotle, Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Piaget; in actuality, have been creative acts based on insight, and have not been nor will they be the composite of a potporri of the empirical building block claims which constitute the literature on effective teaching (Morris, 1983).

There is a proper theory base for teaching; one that is too often ignored in the preparation and supervision of teachers and in research on teaching. This professional theory base, according to Broudy, consists of those theories which site problems of teaching in their historical, psychological, philosophical, and societal context. As he so aptly noted, "many of the problems of teaching are rooted in such contexts and many of the criticisms of the ... schools are rooted in ignorance of them." (p. 37). Broudy then follows this with a conclusion that condemns much of the current technological approaches to teaching that dominate the current thinking on effective teaching, approaches that are clearly only partial theories at best, and only partially useful

therefore in making sense of educational phenomena. Broudy justifies his position this way:

> "Put into their appropriate contexts many educational problems cease to be matters of technique. For example, it is futile and mischievous to assess the competence of teachers without understanding the change in the surrogatory rules of the school with respect to the family, the community, and the culture." (p. 37)

A Critical Manner, Teacher Supervision and Reforming Teaching

There seems to be five practices that must be incorporated into any teaching supervisory practice to render it conducive to the development of a critical manner on their practices by teachers. First, supervision must be practiced within the supporting structure of a supervisory team or group. Ideally, the team would consist of the teacher supervised, one or more of his or her immediate work colleagues, the supervisor, and perhaps some students of the teacher supervised. The team must have as its focus the four professional decisions that teachers must make; namely planning, implementing, problem-solving, and improving or reforming. Second, the supervisory conversation that ranges around these four decisions must be lodged in sound educational theories, and infused with appropriate and relevant evidence about people and events that occurred within the teaching situation. Third, the conversants in the supervisory conversation must deem as problematic not solely matters of pedagogy, that is matters of instruction and teacher-student relationships, but THEY MUST DEEM

AS MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS OF CURRICULUM CONTENT. Fourth, the colleagues of the teacher being supervised must be recognized as the most influential and therefore most powerful members of the supervisory team. It is the teacher's colleagues who to a very great degree shape his or her perceptions, attitudes, thinking, and actions, with the supervisor playing not a primary but a secondary role in this shaping process. Finally, and fifth, the major role of the supervisor is to gather information about the teacher's practice, to present it in a reasonably objective fashion, and to nurture the supervisory conversation into serious talk about the underlying theories that guide the teacher's actions in the classroom. In this supervisory conversation, talk from the bag of tricks should not find a home.

I intend to talk more about the supervisory conversation, but first let me return to this important question about curriculum content. Treated as problematic in the growing body of literature on teaching are the character of the teacher's pedagogical knowledge and the application of this knowledge to the realities of teaching. Not treated as problematic to teaching is the body of knowledge that constitutes what is commonly known as curriculum content (Buckman, 1982). Similarly, the literature on teacher supervision and its associated methodologies embrace instructional and managerial techniques to the near total exclusion of matters associated with curriculum content. Clearly, content is central to the act of teaching. It cannot be argued otherwise. Teachers

know something of value and, by virtue of their professional and moral status, must make that knowledge accessible to their students. This failure to recognize the centrality of questions of epistemology in educational theorizing is to me the glaring error in the thinking in vogue on effective teaching and, because of this, effective teaching as a way to reform schooling may be our most recent failure to be recorded in the history of school reform. Perhaps Ohanian put it best when she said that researchers on effective teaching "seem intent on fostering endurance, not excellence. They count minutes-on-task but ignore crucial questions of content." (p. 320).

Let me return to a consideration of the type of supervision that just might be conducive to excellence in schooling. The most frequently used supervisory practice is classroom observation. While observation is clearly important, it is certainly second in significance to the supervisory conversation. The conversation has to be one in which hard hitting dialogue, good humour, and a willingness to help and to improve must run rampant. It must be one in which the delights of interrupted thoughts and talk chase after the possible goal of teaching reform. It must be a conversation in which honesty, shared decision making, shared responsibility, and shared visions are the norms. My position here is a simple one. The success of the supervisory conversation, which can only be determined when the teacher steps back into the instructional arena, directly depends upon the

collegiality and critical manner of the people involved. It is the supervisor that is the one who will make the supervisory conversation one in which serious and thoughtful talk about what was observed occurs. It is essential therefore that the supervisor thinks about, talks about, and practices teaching from a critical perspective.

Teacher collegiality, unfortunately, is not the grist of every day schooling life. Because of the cellular organization of most schools, the majority of teachers spend the largest part of their time physically apart from their colleagues. They struggle with their problems and anxieties alone. Sadder still, they rejoice in their successes alone. Typically, the teachers' society in the school is characterized by norms of not-sharing, by not observing each others work. Because of this, teachers, unlike other professional groups, have not developed a common, professional culture. Because of this, they fail to regard themselves as colleagues who are able to share viable, valid, generalizable bodies of knowledge and skills.

My claims here are supported by two significant studies: Flanders' study of teachers in the province of British Columbia in 1980 and Goodlad's more recent study of schooling in the United States. According to Flanders, the teachers' "sense of being alone on the job is a heavy psychological burden for many and it is seldom relieved." (p. A-14). According to Goodlad (1984), teachers function quite autonomously, but this autonomy seems to

be exercised in a context more of isolation rather than of rich professional dialogue about a plethora of challenging educational alternatives (p. 186). It is this isolation that Eisner (1984) claims is the greatest, most enduring obstacle to improving teacher effectiveness. The best possible way out of this unhealthy and debilitating situation, according to British Columbian teachers, is the one-on-one with an experienced, sympathetic, critical colleague.

Conclusion

Improving what our teachers do must be our most important goal for schooling in Manitoba and the rest of Canada. To do that, we must help them to think better and to think about more important matters than what typically occupies their thoughts now. First and foremost on the road to reform is teachers helping teachers to think better about what it is they teach, how they teach, and why what they are doing is not only possible, but right and good. There can be no excuses when our students have not learned, or have learned that which is useless, wrong, silly, or immoral because our teachers have not fully understood what it is they ought to do and are able to do in our schools.

Notes

1. By compulsory schooling, I refer primarily to schooling that is publically funded. However, I do consider also that which is not, such as private schools, military schools, religious schools. The point is that from age 5 normally, until students reach a particular age, typically 16, they are compelled by law to study, within some institutionalized framework, a school program mandated by the provincial governments. An interesting challenge to the institutionalized dimension of compulsory education currently is from parents who have chosen to teach this compulsory school program to their children in their homes.

2. See Maclean's, 1985, September 23, 98(38), p. 6-7.

3. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

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